

# Yours in Revolution: Retrofitting Carlos the Jackal

By Samuel Thomas

## Abstract

This paper explores the representation of ‘Carlos the Jackal’, the one-time ‘World’s Most Wanted Man’ and ‘International Face of Terror’ – primarily in cinema but also encompassing other forms of popular culture and aspects of Cold War policy-making. At the centre of the analysis is Olivier Assayas’s *Carlos* (2010), a transnational, five and a half hour film (first screened as a TV mini-series) about the life and times of the infamous militant. Concentrating on the various ways in which Assayas expresses a critical preoccupation with names and faces through complex formal composition, the project examines the play of abstraction and embodiment that emerges from the narrativisation of terrorist violence. Lastly, it seeks to engage with the hidden implications of *Carlos* in terms of the intertwined trajectories of formal experimentation and revolutionary politics.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Carlos the Jackal, naming, faciality, Cold War, embodiment, Assayas.

Tell them I'm from Venezuela and my name is Carlos. Tell them I'm the famous Carlos. They know me.

OPEC raid, Vienna, 1975.

Individu Très Dangereux. N'Hésite Pas A Faire Usage De Ses Arms.

Interpol Wanted Notice.

El hombre de las mil caras, de los mil nombres, de los mil atentados...

Voiceover for the trailer of *Carlos, el Terrorista*  
(dir. René Cardona Jr., 1979).

## Monsieur Ilich Ramírez Sánchez: An Introduction

The trial of Ilich Ramírez Sánchez in the final months of 2011 marked the brief reappearance of one of the late twentieth century's most notorious figures: the 'celebrity terrorist' (Burleigh 2008: 179) and self-styled 'professional revolutionary' (Smith 2012: 20) who has been memorably described, using terms borrowed from the Fluxus movement, as a 'mixed media neo-baroque happening' (Home 1994). With the finer points of an immensely protracted legal process finally in place, the 'Pimpernel' of Cold War militancy and one-time 'icon of menace' (Bradshaw 2010) was summoned from his extended detention in Clairvaux prison. It was the second occasion on which the Palais de Justice had hosted the defendant, who was already serving a life sentence issued in 1997 for three murders (usually referred to as the 'rue Toullier' killings after an address in Paris's Latin Quarter). Unlike the first hearing though, when he was 'treated with all the curiosity due to a captured yeti', the press benches were 'more than half empty' (Smith 2012: 20) and coverage was notably sparse and functional. 'Monsieur Ramírez Sánchez', as he was pointedly addressed by the judges, had returned to a radically changed world (Smith 2012: 20). With the trial entirely focused on a bombing campaign carried out in France during the early 1980s (and thus pervaded by a very 'domestic' sense of restitution and retrospect), it was not only eclipsed by the international shadow-play of 'Operation Neptune Spear',<sup>1</sup> but also by the chain of violent flashpoints that punctuated 2011 more generally. The trial, in other words, became little more than a footnote to what Slavoj Žižek has poetically called 'The Year of Dreaming Dangerously': 'a series of shattering events, from the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street movement, from the UK riots to [Anders] Breivik's ideological madness' (2012: 1). Even the tabloid-friendly fact that the defendant was being represented by his wife, the outspoken French lawyer Isabelle Coutant-Peyre, failed to raise much consternation.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps conscious of this, Ramírez Sánchez certainly grasped his opportunity to rage against the dying of the light when asked if he had anything to contribute before sentencing. After a decade and a half as inmate number 872686/X (including spells in solitary confinement), he spent a full *five hours* discoursing on subjects that ranged from 'memories of coffee and marijuana at a café near the Sorbonne' to 'the Zionist

infiltration of Arab and Western intelligence services' (Smith 2012: 20). His fate, however, was already confirmed. This forceful (not to mention eccentric) performance, both resisting and reinforcing his status as a living anachronism, could only prolong the inevitable: 'When at last the prisoner could think of nothing more to say, sentence was passed and he was told that he wouldn't be eligible for parole for another 18 years. At which point he will be 80' (Smith 2012: 20). A much-circulated remark by the political scientist Francois-Bernard Huyghe appeared to sum the proceedings up: the former 'symbol of international leftist terrorism' was now 'a dinosaur' (Sage 2011).<sup>3</sup>

The extent to which the defendant can be written off with such apparent ease is an issue I will return to later, especially as the liberal triumphalism that might typically underpin this verdict – what Huyghe himself would call *la soft-idéologie* (Sunic 2011: 178) – papers over so many of the cracks in popular narratives of the Cold War and the subsequent 'extinction', to extend the metaphor, of armed revolutionary struggle. As discredited and reprehensible as this 'dinosaur' might be, I would nevertheless suggest from the outset that consigning him to the dustbin of history is by no means a straightforward or politically transparent procedure. Moreover, I would argue that one of the most compelling lessons to emerge from studying Ramírez Sánchez with fresh eyes is the way in which a certain complacency about the pastness of the past (and indeed about the inevitability and legitimacy of the present status quo) is disturbed. In line with the notion of 'retrofitting' that I have used in my title, this is a lesson that heavily informs the analysis that follows. We are, after all, dealing with a figure who was once considered far *ahead* of his time before he fell out of it, a figure who can be interpreted as somehow both spectacularly oblivious and profoundly attuned to the cost (in every sense) of his gruesome activities: 'Because you are my friend,' he once quipped whilst holding a Tokarev pistol to an acquaintance's head, 'I will kill you for nothing' (Follain 1998: 127; Cummings 2009: 107). The 'cost' of simply dismissing him out of hand, however, is a one-dimensional understanding of the violence that has shaped and shaken the current world-system, too often exclusively conceived of through the all-consuming prism of 9/11. The cost, at least potentially, is a depressing reiteration of the intellectual deadlock between 'the twin insanities' of terrorism and counter-terrorism.<sup>4</sup> For the time being though, it is sufficient to note that the questions raised by the trial set up some of the primary concerns of this project, which concentrates on the cinematic fictionalisation of 'Monsieur Ilich Ramírez Sánchez' but also considers his broader status in popular culture per se. With that in mind, the quote I have just cited (which is itself a half-remembered snippet of dialogue from a film)<sup>5</sup> becomes doubly instructive in the sense that it constitutes a rare instance of convergence between verifiable actuality and the florid, hyperreal representations of him that have developed since the late seventies.

More specifically then, this project explores the complex ways in which fictional versions of Ramírez Sánchez emerge from and interact with the so-called ‘accumulation of facts’ – a deceptively simple phrase used by Olivier Assayas to explain the difficult process of bringing this eerie and enormous character to the screen. Simultaneously marked by a playful openness and a highly self-conscious sense of directorial vision, it is only through the ‘accumulation of facts’, Assayas claims, that Ramírez Sánchez ‘take[s] life in front of us’, that the ‘different chapters’ of his existence cohere into an authentic ‘presence’ (qtd. in Marcus 2012: 190-191). If the ‘accumulation of facts’ conditions Assayas’s strategy as a director – as cryptic as that might be at this stage – then reflecting on what was revealed and occluded in the formally circumscribed space of the courtroom, as well as in the ‘integrated, overlapping’ spaces of the ‘global media’ (Buck-Morss 2003: 129), therefore helps to establish a critical framework that is robust enough to deal with the unstable relationship between man and myth, fact and fiction. ‘Myths do exist’, the defendant is on record as stating to a reporter (Hamm 2007: 161), whilst at the same time openly mocking the disinformation associated with his name (‘he is a Soviet agent, he is making a nuclear bomb’) and complaining that his actions have been ‘blown up out of all proportion’ (Follain 1998: 310). As the details of the trial implicitly demonstrate, exploring what it means to tell the story of Ramírez Sánchez on film means exploring the awkward and intriguing schisms that emanate from this consistently inconsistent persona – from his previous incarnation as an ‘unanswerable threat’ (Yallop 1998: 5) to the washed-up courtroom windbag dismissed by Huyghe. Prompted by Greil Marcus’s work in the only English-language overview of Assayas’s career, it also means engaging with how ‘past and future’ are ‘sucked into the immediacy of what’s-happening-now’ on the screen (2012: 192).

On one level, the sentence passed on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December institutes legal justice with regard to the attacks that the defendant was undoubtedly involved in co-ordinating between 1982-83. These included two train bombings and a blast outside the offices of an Arabic language magazine on rue Marbeuf in Paris, cumulatively killing eleven people and injuring more than a hundred. Those, as it were, are the facts, or at least *some* facts – the facts around which a legal narrative has been successfully constructed. On another, the trial clearly generates (perhaps reignites would be more accurate) much wider questions about performativity, mediation, (mis)recognition, historical demarcation, the secret and public machinery of the State, the ‘branding’ associated with political violence and so on.

In addition, the trial’s structural inability to address the international web of relationships that facilitated these acts of terrorism (despite the elementary fact that three of the defendant’s accomplices, two Germans and a Palestinian, were tried in absentia),<sup>6</sup> points towards the role that fiction might play in retrofitting violent events. The rue Marbeuf car bomb, for example, was not simply a localised, self-contained outrage with terrible consequences for those unfortunate enough to have

been in the vicinity of the blast (a number of survivors, it should be noted, were in attendance at the trial, as well as relatives of Nelly Guillerme, the 30-year-old pregnant secretary who was killed by flying shrapnel). Despite the variations in accounts, and as difficult as it might be to move on so rapidly from such grim particulars, all credible sources on the subject emphasise a quite startling series of connections, collaborations and complementary agendas. First there are the details from the shop floor: forged documents provided by the Stasi in East Berlin; twenty kilos of explosives picked up in Postojna, Yugoslavia; large sums of cash in various European currencies; a rented Opel Kadett carrying Austrian licence plates driven to France. Behind the closed doors that line the corridors of power, however, we find a deeper story: Syrian political maneuvering that can be traced through the *Mukhabarat* and all the way up to President Hafez al-Assad; diplomatic pressure on the Mitterrand government to toughen its stance on terrorism; the shadowy presence of the infamous lawyer Jacques Vergès (known in the press as ‘the Devil’s Advocate’), who would eventually represent Ramírez Sánchez at his first hearing. In terms of the ‘human element’, we discover bitter personal scores involving the editor of the magazine and even a warped kind of romance (Yallop 1993: 436-440; Follain 1998: 175-200; Davis 2007: 75-76). Whilst the bomb can therefore be understood as part of a ‘dirty, private war’, in the words of the defendant’s right-hand man Johannes Weinrich (Follain 1998: 175), it is also part of a much larger succession of proxy wars between and within nation states, driven by a diverse range of ideological, territorial and economic interests. Not just terrorism, but ‘Terror Incorporated’.<sup>7</sup>

Assayas’s response to these networked realities – the basis of an important montage sequence in the film that will shortly become the centerpiece of my discussion – is highly sophisticated: cerebral yet instinctive, strategically indulgent yet tough-mindedly sober, sensitive to what criminologist Mark S. Hamm calls ‘the set of repressed ideas related to the disjunction between terrorism’s facts and legends, a disjunction upon which the image of terrorism is built in the first place’ (2007: 162). What I mean by this is that Assayas does not *passively* (or fatalistically) participate in the endless processing of ‘images of the unmappable system’ described by Fredric Jameson, in which the cinematic imagination confronts a kind of ‘sound barrier’ in the face of the global ‘social totality’ (1992: 4). Neither, related to that influential paradigm, are we simply presented with a rehash of the paranoid, conspiratorial aesthetic that dominates so many explorations of Cold War history. The stultifying effects of obsessive ‘periodisation’ are also bypassed (which is not to say that Assayas’s attention to period detail is anything less than exacting: his project is a veritable symphony in chronologically-attuned leather and sheep-skin, wreathed in ubiquitous clouds of cigarette smoke). Rather, I contend, we can identify the starting point for a creative aetiology of terrorism that is uniquely amenable to the language of cinema and able to negotiate the long-standing ‘form-problems’ of postmodernity in a distinctive fashion (Jameson

1992: 4), confident enough to flirt with a kind of ‘terrorist chic’ only to robustly overcome it.

## On the Name

Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, of course, is better known to the world as ‘Carlos’, his long-standing *nom de guerre*, and indeed as ‘the Jackal’, the title bestowed on him by the English press after the discovery of a Frederick Forsyth novel in a London flat where he had once stashed arms and documents.<sup>8</sup> It is safe to say that both of these represent a significant upgrade on ‘El Gordo’ (or ‘Fatso’), the derogatory handle he was taunted with as a child in Venezuela (a detail which has predictably been identified as an echoing source of resentment by many of his deterministically-inclined biographers). Despite the fact that he would, out of necessity, adopt many other names in the course of his charmed and demented *dérive* through recent geopolitical history – from ‘Adolfo José Müller Bernal’ to ‘Abdallah Barakhat’ (Follain 1998: 70; 205) – Carlos is the name which has stuck. If the forename given to him by his Marxist father proved impossible to live up to (his younger siblings are called Vladimir and Lenin), then Carlos is the name that he has made his own. It is the name through which he has both escaped from and defined (a version of) himself. Carlos is the name forever ensnared with the dangerous dreams – ‘emancipatory’, ‘obscure’ and ‘destructive’ (Žižek 2012: 1) – of an era that is past in one sense but very much *present* in another (by which I mean that its complex and contested legacies are still being worked through). Seared into public consciousness, it is the name that will always be associated, in the neatly resonant language of marketing, with ‘The Man Who Hijacked the World’.

*Carlos* is also the name given to Olivier Assayas’s 2010 film about the life and times of the infamous Jackal, the tag-line for which I have just cited, described by Marcus as a ‘political travelogue’, an ‘on-the-run biography’ and, more mysteriously, as an example ‘of a film itself thinking’ (2012: 190; 198). It was initially shown as a three-part mini-series on the French TV station Canal+, who also provided the bulk of the project’s \$18 million budget. Whilst this arrangement points towards new creative/economic possibilities in the relationship between the big and small screen – a ‘made for TV’ project shot in 35mm CinemaScope – it also highlights the doggedness of certain hierarchies of value. Despite the prestige attached to large-scale productions such as *The Wire*, and despite the fact that it was shown out of competition at Cannes because of its televisual origins, cast and director have been notably consistent in referring to *Carlos* as a *film*. Various theatrical and on-demand versions of *Carlos* were released just a year before the second trial of its principal subject, which is significant in the sense that Assayas took something of a risk by depicting crimes that were not yet legally codified (although remarkably, Carlos has never been held to account for the one act of terrorism he will openly admit to: the spectacular OPEC raid of 1975).<sup>9</sup> The short-



est of the abridged versions clocks in at 165 minutes, whilst the longest of the 'complete' versions stretches to 338 minutes.

It is not the first film to deal with the figure of Carlos, with previous efforts including lumpen thrillers such as Lawrence Gordon Clark's *Death Has a Bad Reputation* (1990) and Christian Duguay's *The Assignment* (1997), but it is certainly the first film about Carlos to be directed by a 'post-punk auteur'<sup>10</sup> with a *Cahiers du Cinema* background and a long-standing enthusiasm for Guy Debord, who is noted for his engagement with 'transnational flows of people and money' and 'cultural exchanges between East and West' (Shaviro 2009: 35). Moreover, it is the first film to offer a portrait of the Venezuelan militant that goes beyond the pervasive media image of Carlos the super-terrorist, 'the bad man in the black hat' (Dobson and Payne 1977: 7) who combined 'his murderous activities with a play-boy lifestyle' (Carr 2006: 215). Indeed, the ambition and scale of Assayas's project is truly striking in this respect: a sprawling, multinational cast that far eclipses previous cross-cultural works such as *Demonlover* (2002) and *Clean* (2004); eight languages (with the figure of Carlos himself speaking in five); locations ranging across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East (with areas of Lebanon often doubling for spaces in countries such as Syria and Sudan, where protracted filming proved politically impossible); a thirty year time-frame; an idiosyncratic soundtrack born out of the collectorial fever and polymorphous musicality of the iPod's shuffle function. It is the only production, with the not-so-honourable exception of forgotten Mexican B-movie *Carlos, el Terrorista* (dir. René Cardona Jr., 1979), to be *named* after its central protagonist. Interestingly, however, the title *Carlos the Jackal* has been used for most DVD versions.<sup>11</sup> Although the word 'Jackal' is neither uttered nor displayed at any point, this supplementary epithet not only evokes Forsyth's fictional assassin (who was of course brought to cinematic life by Fred Zinnemann in 1973) but also the predatory thrills that might alert a non-arthouse audience to the film's action genre credentials, set as it is in an authentically lurid 'world of faked passports, bought sex, and the constant threat of violence' (McCabe 2011). In addition, links to the bangs and bucks of blockbuster culture are consolidated in a more straightforward (yet faintly uncanny) way: Carlos is played by fellow Venezuelan Édgar Ramírez, who appeared as the stylish hitman 'Paz' in *The Bourne Ultimatum* (dir. Paul Greengrass, 2007), an adaptation of Robert Ludlum's novel (1990) in which Carlos features as the main antagonist.

Taking stock of all this, it might consequently be said that there are numerous 'Carloses' in play here. Firstly, there is the flesh-and-blood sexagenarian inmate of Clairvaux, who claims to have chosen the name as a personal tribute to Venezuelan leader Carlos Andrés Pérez Rodríguez, a fellow *gocho* (meaning born in the Andean Northwest) famous for nationalizing the country's oil industry. Indeed, this is precisely the tale privately relayed to Venezuela's representative at OPEC, Dr. Valentín Hernández, during Assayas's recreation of the raid in Vienna.

According to Bassam Abu Sharif, however, a former member of the PFLP<sup>12</sup> and later a prominent spokesman for Arafat's PLO, Carlos was the name *bestowed* on him (thus hinting at a more diminished sense of agency) whilst the young revolutionary was training in Beirut. Drawing on the mistaken belief that Carlos is a Spanish corruption of the Arabic name Khalil – the etymological root of Carlos is in fact the Common Germanic noun *karlaz*, which ironically means 'free man' (Hoad 1993: 76) – Abu Sharif explains his logic as follows: 'I thought it might suit a South American who wanted passionately to fight for an Arab cause. It was just my own little joke' (Follain 1998: 29-30). Whatever the nature of the name's general and particular origins though, 'Carlos' represents an identity that has entirely displaced the Venezuelan once called Ilich Ramírez Sánchez – the name and the 'character' that he has given himself over to. This is Carlos the living brand, the Carlos described in such loaded, overdetermined terms by those who have entered his orbit: as 'a condottiere' and 'a mercenary' by the former Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky (Yallop 1993: 407); as a 'great fighter' for Palestinian liberation by Hugo Chávez (James 2009); as a 'political prisoner' by his wife and lawyer Coutant-Peyre (Willsher 2004); as a 'gangster', a 'drunk' and a 'non-threat' by Mossad, if emails obtained by Wikileaks from NorAm Intelligence are to be trusted (Dafinoiu 2011); as fundamentally 'bourgeois' by Anis Naccache (aka 'Khalid'), one of his co-conspirators in the OPEC raid (Yallop 1993: 411); as 'a psychopath' by Hans-Joachim Klein (aka 'Angie'), a one-time chauffeur to Jean-Paul Sartre and another key associate from his hijacking glory days (Schroeder 2007).

Secondly, there is the media myth of 'the Jackal' and the various pulp villains named Carlos that have developed within and around that exaggerated framework. This is the Carlos who appears in the spy novels, tabloid journalism and straight-to-video erotic thrillers of yesteryear – the preternatural hitman, a 'murderous communist anti-hero' in the Cold War's peculiar star system (Carr 2006: 213). As Christopher Dobson and Ronald Payne proclaim in their late seventies bestseller *The Carlos Complex* (1977):

By means of the bomb and the machine-pistol, Carlos captured the public imagination. People may be horrified by him, but they are also enthralled by his exploits. His eagerness to kill, his contempt for the normal rules of civilized behaviour, his sexuality, are all a part of his spell. ... [I]t is our belief that his importance goes much beyond his notoriety, for, as the symbol of international terrorism, he has made ordinary people aware that there is a worldwide network of revolutionaries determined for a variety of reasons to destroy the fabric of modern society (7).

Although Dobson and Payne's study does contain some intriguing but underdeveloped insights – with the claim that 'terrorism is theatre' (1977: 15) prefiguring the deeper exploration of this notion in art and philosophy from Don DeLillo to Jean Baudrillard (and indeed in Assayas's film) – there is no doubt that the Carlos they evoke is effectively a sort of 'terrorist James Bond' (Carr 2006: 215). The opening sequence of Duguay's *The Assignment* helps to crystallize this image.



After the camera swirls magically upwards from the pavements of Paris, accompanied by the sounds of vigorous sex, our first glimpse of Carlos comes via the broken shutters of a hotel room, his face bathed in an infernal red light, staring into the distance after pleasuring an anonymous beautiful woman (whose naked body is cynically exposed whilst the dignity of actor Aidan Quinn is preserved). He then portentously kills a spider with his post-coital cigarette – a very obvious but nonetheless instructive sign of both the libidinal investments and intricate web of connections that have come to define him. Later in the movie, the veteran CIA agent Jack Shaw (played by Donald Sutherland) solemnly insists that Carlos ‘has personally carried out or masterminded the worst terrorist acts in modern history’.<sup>13</sup> The pop cultural Carlos is therefore also the Carlos whose name has been linked to an extraordinary series of flashpoints: from the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics to the assassination of exiled Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza and the hostage crisis at the US Embassy in Tehran (Yallop 1993: 1-5). Whilst much of this hyperbole is easy to dismiss with the most basic research (there is not a scrap of evidence to link him to any of these events), the use and abuse of the name Carlos has had very tangible effects and is tied to very specific ideologies and policies. Material unearthed by the documentary maker Adam Curtis, for example, reveals that a fanciful story linking Carlos to a Libyan-backed plot to kill Ronald Regan – with the Jackal heading up a six-man team of deadly mercenaries – was fed to the American press by a State Department committee whose express purpose was to discredit the late Colonel Gaddafi (Curtis 2012).

Taking a cue from Matthew Carr’s polemical but compelling work in this field, the ‘pulp’ Carlos can thus be understood a key figure in the development of Western ‘terrorology’, a ‘pseudo-discipline’ born amidst the plots and counter-plots of the Cold War that has grown to incorporate a huge range of private and government funded think-tanks, academics and security contractors (with the terrorological marketplace judderingly reanimated by 9/11 after a brief hiatus during the era of Clintonite optimism). It is a persistent and ‘alarmist’ strain of terrorology, Carr insists, which has systematically obfuscated the liberal State’s capacity for political violence and its complicity in fostering such violence, constructing terrorism (and here his argument takes on an implicitly Foucauldian slant with its emphasis on discursive power) as a ‘uniquely barbaric and immoral’ form of insurrectionary aggression that is ‘antithetical’ to democracy and the “‘free society’” (2006: 209).

Thirdly, there are of course the multiple cuts of Assayas’s film in which Édgar Ramírez embodies his compatriot with a physical commitment that recalls *Raging Bull*-era De Niro. Or rather, there is the screen presence of Ramírez-as-Carlos within the narrative universe of the fiction named after him. Indeed, it could be argued that the very terms and conditions of the film’s structure are established by the process of naming. During Carlos’s first meeting with his PFLP master Wadie Haddad (which is also the film’s first significant instance of dialogue), he is or-

dered to choose a codename. It is perhaps no surprise that this exchange features prominently in the trailer<sup>14</sup> given what is stake here, not to mention the dramatic frisson generated by pitting Haddad's grouchy, paternalistic authority (brilliantly realised by the great Lebanese actor Ahmad Kaabour) against Carlos's thrusting confidence. His reply is immediate, concise and suspiciously self-satisfied: 'I already have'. Importantly, this encounter in Beirut is dated by the film's captions in 1973 (Carlos visits Haddad as part of a reorganisation of the PFLP's European operations a month after the killing of Mohammed Boudia in Israel's 'Operation Wrath of God'). This was the year in which Pérez Rodríguez won the Venezuelan election but almost three years *before* the country's oil industry was officially nationalised. If that economic decision was an apparently decisive factor in Carlos's unique tribute to the president, as he later boasts during the OPEC sequence, then we therefore uncover an immensely subtle play on the ambiguity and confusion surrounding the 'ownership' of his name – a hyper-awareness of the uncertainty caused by the competing versions of Carlos that does not, perhaps surprisingly, produce anxious experimental convulsions, but instead manifests itself non-disruptively at the stream-lined level of formal composition, narrative flow and performance. In addition, compounded by Assayas's confident claim in a *Sight & Sound* feature that 'Carlos has been lying about everything from the start' (Thompson 2010), we find a buried but identifiable emphasis on the duplicitous charisma, inflated rhetoric and narcissism of Carlos before we witness him carry out any kind of violence action (anticipating the developed picture of a man who was fully prepared to exploit, encourage and even *believe* the myth that grew out of him, as well as vain enough to check in for liposuction shortly before his eventual capture in Sudan). We find a telling indication that Carlos is a name that cannot be taken at face value.

I would therefore suggest that these multiple, overlapping 'Carloses' operate in something resembling the rich 'semantic field' identified by Derrida in his three-essay collection *On the Name* (1995). Or, in other words, the proliferation of the name 'Carlos' and its supplements (which mirrors the wild proliferation of rumours and sightings whilst he was at large) demonstrates the way in which 're-naming', 'reappointing' and 'renown' are intimately bound together (signalled by Derrida, as the introduction to the volume explains, via the hyphen he inserts into the French word *re-nommant*), as well as the process by which naming generates its own 'excess' (Dutoit 1995: ix-xi). More straightforwardly, I would suggest that the name of the 'famous Carlos', as he is reported to have referred to himself during the OPEC raid (Smith 1976: 234),<sup>15</sup> casts a long shadow over the composition of Assayas's narrative. It is a sort of 'supername' (Dutoit 1995: xi) which does not simply denote his celebrity – 'what is strange and interesting about Carlos', Assayas claims, 'is that he became some kind of star' (*Russia Today* 2011) – but a name that is deeply connected to both the traversal and reassertion of the boundaries between fact and fiction, the interchange between overground and under-

ground, and indeed the boundaries of the law, the nation state and so on. With that in mind, one of the aims of this investigation is to show how Assayas's film is acutely sensitive to the power of Carlos's name and its ability to cut across different levels of culture and society – a power which is actively dramatised through the film's eclectic generic reference points (from the rise-and-fall trajectory of the American gangster movie to Robert Bresson's cinema of understatement to MTV), and its insistent, quite literal preoccupation with border-crossings and forms of identification (there are surely few films on earth that contain more shots of passports, suitcases and airport security booths).

Distinct from other recent productions about revolutionary and/or criminal figures such as Steven Soderbergh's *Che* (2008) and Jean-François Richet's *Mesrine* (2008), it can thus be argued that *Carlos* is 'signed' – in a very specific way – by its eponymous anti-hero. Despite the real Carlos's blustery protestations about the inaccuracy of certain details (Thompson 2010), which extended to a failed legal attempt to gain access to the screenplay and a bizarre open letter to Édgar Ramírez published in *Le Figaro* on the day of the premiere (Rohter 2010; Rose 2010), it cannot be said that Assayas takes the name of Carlos in vain. It is part of the truth-claim of Assayas's fiction, part of the striking way in which Assayas rejects what he calls the 'fake human texture' of imagined motives and speculative psychology and instead seeks to explore how individuals are 'transformed as history is being transformed around them' – in this case an individual who is caught up within the very '*fabric* of the history of his times', history with 'a major H' (qtd. in Marcus 2012: 192).

Carlos's 'signature', as it were, emerges from the *modus operandi* I touched on earlier, from the film's steady accumulation of actions and reactions, with very little in the way of conventional exposition: no childhood memories, traumatic flashbacks or primal scenes; no obvious moments of epiphany; no concrete explanations for the major decisions he takes; no laboured signposting of the gaps between his words and deeds. As Carlos and his band are transported from one safe-house to another, bundling themselves into cars and planes, propelled by a kind of fugitive energy that infects the entire project, we experience a stream of fast-moving impressions of his life (typically accentuated by hand-held camera work), as well as more sedentary and languid sequences in banal but 'coded' interior spaces such as bedrooms and bathrooms (there are a number of occasions, for example, where we see Carlos naked and/or examining himself in the mirror, which both encourage and resist the viewer's interpretative instincts). These, in turn, blur seamlessly into sweatily realised action set-pieces (with the watershed that was OPEC taking up an entire hour) and tactical portraits of the larger forces shaping the destiny of both Carlos and the geopolitical planet (often using news-reel footage to do so, ranging from Arafat's famous speech at the UN in 1974 to the fall of the Berlin Wall, much of which is taken from the BBC Motion Gallery and France's Institut National de l'Audiovisuel). In more concrete terms, howev-

er, I would suggest it is no accident that Assayas's camera lingers so pointedly over a letter written to Gaston Defferre, the French Minister of the Interior, after the imprisonment of two comrades in 1982: Carlos's then wife Magdalena Kopp,<sup>16</sup> who had been initially recruited into his circle by Weinrich from the German RZ (or *Revolutionäre Zellen*), and Bruno Bréguet, a Swiss citizen who had previously grabbed headlines when he became the first European to be sentenced in Israel for involvement in pro-Palestinian militancy (Follain 1998: 176-177).

With Ramírez providing an urbane but implicitly threatening voiceover (the disembodied spoken words are closely modelled on the actual text), Assayas cuts between the process of writing, where we see Carlos hunched over a table in the faded grandeur of his temporary home in Hungary (Fig. 1), and a scene in Budapest airport (Fig. 2) where he hands an envelope to 'Heidi', aka Christa Margot Fröhlich (another recruit from Germany, played by Jule Böwe, who is tasked with delivering it to the French embassy in the Hague, a building that is dramatically stormed by the Japanese Red Army at a much earlier point in the film). Fröhlich, formerly a school teacher, was one of the accomplices tried in absentia (and actually acquitted) at Carlos's 2011 trial. With the diegetic background sounds of the airport weirdly modulating into non-diegetic ambient noise, the narration continues and we are returned to the scene of writing (and therefore taken back in time) using an intense over-the-shoulder perspective (Fig. 3). As Carlos writes, surrounded by a clutter of ashtrays, glasses and ornaments, the camera gradually zeroes in on his thumbs as he includes two fingerprints (his unique biometric 'signature') to authenticate the document. A final flourish in the voiceover almost brings the sequence to close – 'signed, the Organisation of Arab Armed Struggle, Arm of the Arab Revolution, Carlos' – before Fröhlich is briefly shown posting the letter, therefore prefiguring the series of lethal packages she will deliver when the French authorities refuse to meet Carlos's demands (Fig. 4).



Figure 1. Writing to Defferre





Figure 2. Carlos and Heidi at Budapest airport

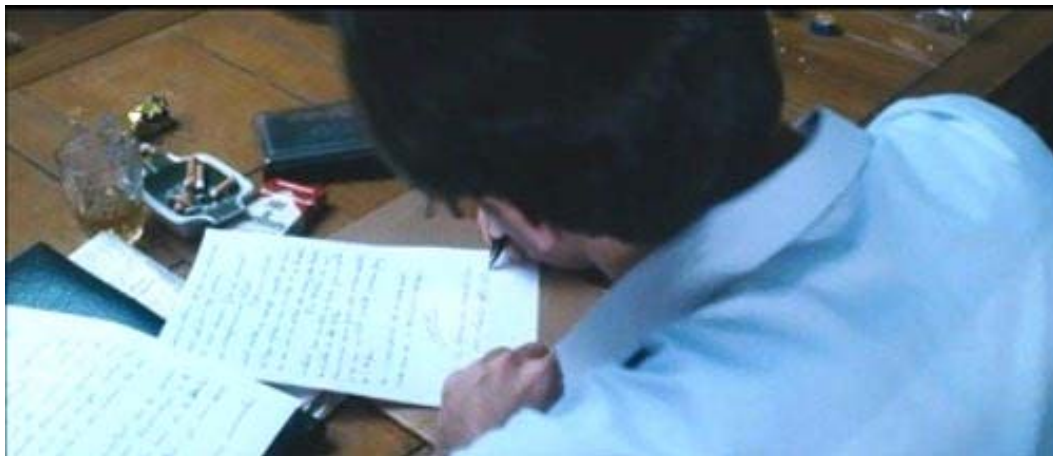


Figure 3. Signing the letter



Figure 4. Delivery

Beyond the weird resonances this sequence has acquired in light of the letter from the real Carlos to the actor who plays him writing an earlier text, I would argue that Assayas's film embraces the instabilities and possibilities of the 'semantic field' that is of such interest to deconstruction and psychoanalysis in a way that is tangible in the very mechanics of editing. Or in other words, Assayas explores what it means to carry, to circulate, to change and to sign one's name – and indeed to 'author' acts of lethal terrorism – precisely through these carefully managed cinematic relays: between intimacy and breadth, the personal and the political, rhetoric and violence, the node and the network. If many of the acts of terrorism perpetuated and planned by Carlos frequently went awry – sometimes almost comically – then there is a strange, forceful consistency here at the level of 'post-al' violence (and indeed in the sense that terrorism revives the subversive malevolence of the letter at the very moment when hand-written communication was being seriously challenged by new electronic media). A letter signed by Carlos, to adapt Jacques Lacan's notoriously enigmatic claim, always arrives at its destination. Moreover, questions of naming and signing reconnect us to my earlier emphasis on the 'costs', both literally and metaphorically, associated with Carlos's status in cultural politics. During the flight from Vienna to Algiers that formed part of the OPEC raid, a Nigerian oil minister is said to have asked Carlos for his autograph and documents bearing Carlos's signature can now fetch many hundreds of pounds at auction (Follain 1998: 98; Burleigh 2008: 181). Assayas naturally chooses to dramatise this episode (a telling precursor to the extended letter-writing scene in Budapest) and his 'investment' in naming is therefore a distinctive part of the film's aesthetic, as well as its metacritical conscience (Fig. 5). His film, I would contend, is a product of the kind of speculative practices imagined by Susan Buck-Morss in *Thinking Past Terror* (2003), her important foray into the post 9/11 culture-scape. It can be understood, at least potentially, as 'an insiders' revolt among the players' of the '[c]olliding and collaborating' 'truth-regimes' of 'artworld and theoryworld' (86).

An earlier exchange during Carlos's lavish 30<sup>th</sup> birthday party celebration, also in Budapest, gives these points more substance. In 1979, Carlos is surprised

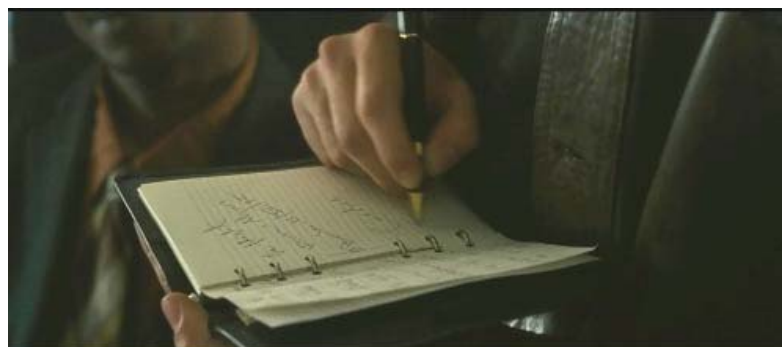


Figure 5. OPEC autograph.

by a visit from a former lover and friend, who is herself *unnamed* in the film. Here, Assayas allows himself some poetic licence: the character (played with believable restraint by Juana Acosta) is



clearly based on Nydia Tobón, a Colombian woman living in London who would go on to write an odd, incoherent memoir (later dismissed as a ‘novel’ designed to raise quick cash) about her ‘vivencias’ with the Jackal entitled *Carlos: ¿Terrorista o Guerrillero?* (1978), as well as testifying at his first trial in 1997. The publication date of her book surely disqualifies her from attending the birthday party, although Carlos was gracious (and indeed creepy) enough to commend her as an ‘elegant woman’ from across the courtroom (Follain 1998: 323). Simply cast-listed as ‘une amie de Carlos’, however, Assayas provides himself with some room to manoeuvre amidst the painstaking research for the film compiled by *Le Monde*’s Stephen Smith. A raucous gypsy band plays in the background (up-tempo violin and tinkling cimbalom) as Carlos spots her through the crowd and clasps his hands together religiously, the volume dimming slightly as their conversation becomes the principal focus and the camera zooms in. The scene is bathed in beautiful dappled sunlight that mirrors the copious glasses of champagne being circulated. They kiss and embrace, both looking thoroughly moneyed and business-like when measured against the rather edgier (though nonetheless well groomed) pair of Latino leftists we see in London and Paris during part one. ‘Nydia’ then hands him a pair of cuff-links bearing the flag of the Cuban Revolution – a gesture that quite evidently recalls a lost idealism, especially in light of the fact that Carlos has recently bought himself a new Mercedes. ‘*La bandera de victoria, Ilich*’ (‘The flag of victory, Ilich’) she states with both conviction and a hint of wistfulness. His expression, in a wonderful piece of acting from Ramírez, tells us a great deal – warm and smiling, yet also palpably quizzical, even slightly nervous, his lips readjusting themselves beneath a thick moustache. ‘*Hace tanto tiempo que no me llaman Ilich*’ (‘I haven’t been called Ilich in ages’), he replies (Fig. 6). The fact that we first hear Carlos announce his *nom de guerre* during a heated conversation with Nydia in a London restaurant (Assayas cuts before he utters his new name to Haddad) means that this exchange takes us full circle, whilst at the same time pointing towards the irretrievability of his past self and the moral permanence of his crimes and compromises, as well as a crucial tension between Carlos’s individual agency and the historical currents that bear him along.



Figure 6. ‘Hace tanto tiempo que no me llaman Ilich’

## The Face of Terror

If, as previously stated, Assayas demonstrates how Carlos's name cannot be taken at face value, then the value of faces (if that contortion can be forgiven), as well as the proverbial relationship between the name and the face, is an equally vital component of bringing the Jackal to the screen. If the face, as Deleuze and Guattari remark, is a kind of 'horror story' – an 'abstract machine' that 'touches all other parts of the body' (1988: 168; 170) – then Assayas's response to the strange efficacy of Carlos's image, and specifically the efficacy of his face, adds a further layer of complexity to the film's compositional matrix. Before identifying the notable instances of this, however, it is necessary to acknowledge the broader context that Assayas enters into dialogue with.

The most widely reproduced photograph of Carlos, for example, can now be classed as a sort of deviant cousin of Alberto Korda's iconic portrait of Che Guevara – the haunted grandeur of *el Guerrillero Heroico* giving way to the cryptic, almost Buddha-like smirk of *el Terrorista Inescrutable*. This black and white headshot from the early seventies, actually lifted from a forged Peruvian passport that he successfully travelled with on numerous occasions,<sup>17</sup> has been thoroughly 'Warholized', reproduced and manipulated innumerable times across formats ranging from newspaper reports to album covers and ironic t-shirts.<sup>18</sup> It is as 'flattened' and deathless (in the Jamesonian sense) as the silk-screens of Elvis, Marilyn and Mao. Furthermore, it has played a key role in establishing the myth of the Jackal, regardless of the fact that Carlos's face stands in such stark contrast to the villain described in Forsyth's novel – a tall, lean and blond Englishman with grey eyes 'as bleak as a Channel fog' (Forsyth 2011: 93).

Indeed, the photograph also lacks the counter-cultural magnetism and youthful punkishness of the members of the Baader-Meinhof gang (whose faces on police posters around West Germany were crossed out in red as they were successively caught or killed, as well as providing the inspiration for Gerhard Richter's cycle of photo-paintings),<sup>19</sup> and it cannot match the romantic aura associated with the face of Leila Khaled, forever smiling and forever wreathed in a keffiyeh (whose actual face, as opposed to the icon created by Eddie Adams's snapshot, has been radically reconfigured by six plastic surgeries).<sup>20</sup> Neither does this image carry the direct connection to traumatic violence that is etched in the heavily scarred face of Bassam Abu-Sharif – the Palestinian figurehead permanently disfigured by an attempt on his life by Mossad, who was once himself dubbed 'the Face of Terror' by *Time* magazine (a headline reused for Timothy McVeigh after the Oklahoma bombing in 1995) before the Jackal rise to prominence. Yet despite all of this, and in many respects against all logic, Carlos's face functions as a crucial but relatively unacknowledged tipping point in the development of an optico-historical 'grammar' specific to the representation of terrorism, crime and espionage. Indeed, for a certain generation around the globe, the face of 'a chubby dark-haired

Latin with tinted shades' (Carr 2006: 212) is instantly recognisable, even if the danger it once signified has been weakened by the corrosive aura of retro kitsch. What is perhaps most peculiar about the image though, is the way in which Carlos's face is immediately evocative of a particular chapter in the 20<sup>th</sup> century's history of violence whilst at the same time completely overshadowing any coherent sense of the revolutionary cause that he professed to fight for (what he refers to as '*la lucha internacionalista*' when conversing with Nydia in the early stages of Assayas's film), just as it overshadows the inevitable process of ageing and bloating that would afflict Carlos's real, drink-sodden body. It is an image which 'dates' itself, only to eclipse the geopolitical specificity of the processes that brought it into public view.

However we might choose to interpret this photograph, there is no doubt that we can identify Carlos's face as a giant presence in the Cold War's media ecology – the face of the 'World's Most Wanted' man and a face through which a variety of meanings, desires and strategically-sanctioned vested interests have been channelled. Whilst the throaty voice-over for the trailer of *Carlos, El Terrorista* calls him '*el hombre de las mil caras*' (or 'the man of a thousand faces'),<sup>21</sup> playing on the hugely exaggerated notion of Carlos as a master of disguise, he was and is the man of *one* face – *the* face, *that* face. Carlos, explains Brian Jenkins of the RAND Corporation (who offer 'research and development' analysis to the United States military), '*personified* what had until then been faceless violence' during a period of massive expansion in media technologies, replacing 'anonymous men belonging to sets of initials' and 'voices on telephones' with a name, a face and a mythos to rival most film stars and rock bands (Schmidt, 2000). Whilst Jenkins's claim that terrorism before Carlos was 'faceless' is a clearly over-simplified, there is a nonetheless a powerful insight here – doubly so in the aftermath of 9/11 given the fact that Carlos's decades in the limelight serve as a salutary reminder that the viral proliferation of Osama Bin Laden's solemn, hectoring countenance was by no means without precedent (another of the Cold War's Frankensteinian children who was, quite remarkably, living just a few miles away from Carlos in Khartoum before the latter was finally apprehended).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Carlos's own sense of both falling out of time and 'passing the torch', of an Arab face replacing a Latin American, is perhaps expressed in his tokenistic, perplexing conversion to Islam (handled in a single sentence in part 3 of the film, with no discernible effect on his behaviour, when Carlos informs a group of Iranian officials in Sudan that he has married his new wife Lana according to Islamic rites). Even more curiously, Carlos would go on to write and publish a book in French entitled *L'Islam Révolutionnaire* (2003) whilst incarcerated, his passion for extravagant rhetoric undimmed, and the strange vibrations continue when we consider Édgar Ramírez's next major role after playing Carlos: the CIA agent known as 'Larry from Ground Branch' in Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012).

Returning to the central issue at stake in this phase of the analysis, Assayas's film makes use of both the Warholian surface and the hidden depths of Carlos's face, its historicity and its timelessness, in a fashion analogous to his treatment of names and naming. In part one, there are at least four distinct occasions where the infamous photograph is 'quoted', which I will shortly address. To achieve this, Assayas employs intricate shot-making (New Wave-like improvisational movement mixed with claustrophobic framing and blocking) alongside a visceral sort of performative biopolitics. This not only foregrounds the unsettling way in which the face, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, is already 'by nature a close-up', the 'in-human in human beings' (1988: 170), but it also represents a sharply intelligent, non-didactic method of dealing with Carlos's myth and celebrity. Indeed, with that latter point in mind, it is instructive to note that the film completely refuses the temptation to include, say, newspapers bearing Carlos's image flying off the printing press (although he is bravely *told* that 'without newspapers you don't exist' by the Syrian journalist Assem al-Joundi, who is subsequently shot in the head) and the archive footage used, whilst sometimes directly connected to attacks that Carlos committed or co-ordinated, never includes material that singles out the villainous Jackal. Moreover, before exploring the specific instances of 'quotation', the significance of Carlos's face creates useful lines of connection with Assayas's previous work. If an earlier film such as *Boarding Gate* (2007) focuses on a female protagonist who 'registers in her body the transactions and exchanges – monetary and otherwise – that flow through her and define the space around her' (Shaviro 2010: 59), a process that is also important in *Demonlover* (2002) and *Clean* (2004), then in *Carlos* the masculine, 'facialised' body of Édgar Ramírez functions as a sort of anchoring point amidst the shocks, collisions, shady deals and head-spinning geopolitics that define the story and the period.

This is therefore concept-driven but at the same time grubbily organic filmmaking, a response to what Shaviro calls 'the double imperative of abstraction and tactility' (2010: 39). Carlos's clothes, hair and waist-line may change dramatically over the course of the film, with Ramírez gaining a startling 35lbs for the role, and we track his descent into a heavy-limbed, debauched lethargy. We see him sharing a matrimonial bed with Magdalena Kopp and we see him being felled by a prostitute (actually a Stasi informant) in the bathroom of an East Berlin hotel, who horrifyingly chokes on his sperm. We see him visit a doctor in Sudan to treat a varicocele in his right testicle. We see him smoke endless Marlboro cigarettes and drink innumerable glasses of Johnnie Walker whisky – relentlessly absorbing the toxic essences of high-end brands that were forbidden or unavailable to the general populace of the Eastern Bloc and Arab states he relied on for sanctuary (and thus chiming with the way in which Carlos's embodied image encompasses both the sheen of revolutionary glamour, as if his own 'brand' were a layer of sweat, and the rotten core of a deeply compromised and ruthlessly self-interested killer). We see him bound, hooded and stretched on to a secret French

plane when he is captured – his body becoming a form of illicit cargo like one of the transnational arms shipments that Carlos and his group facilitated. We even see him, quite literally, ‘dress up’ as a cut-rate Che Guevara for the OPEC raid, complete with goatee, sideburns and beret – *physically* participating in the post-modern mimicry and replication that would befall his own image.<sup>23</sup> Yet these fluctuations all take place in the shadow of the face that is and always will be Carlos, overcoding the entire film with its weird presence, blurring the distinction between the actual and the impalpable, between effect and affect.

The quotations that punctuate part one are instrumental to this. In fact, the very first time that we see Carlos on screen can be interpreted in these terms, just as his early conversation with Haddad initiates and seals the film’s engagement with naming. Before this meeting takes place, Assayas shoots Carlos disembarking from a plane at Beirut airport. With the camera gliding across the wing to the open door, we see a stream of passengers filing down the airstairs and a hostess bidding them goodbye as the opening guitar of ‘Loveless Love’ by the Feelies become audible – immediately creating a shimmering sense of anticipation and threat (one of various important examples of non-diegetic music). As the soundtrack merges with the noise of cooling turbines and the barely discernible, ethereal drone of a muezzin’s call to prayer, Carlos emerges into the heat and haze of Lebanon sporting a pair of large brown sunglasses. Assayas then relocates us to passport control after a brief establishing shot of shabby buildings at the edge of the airport, which in turn sets in motion a sequence that follows Carlos’s journey to Haddad. The steadily increasing tempo of the music matches the increasing speed of his movements through the city. With all this sensory information, it is therefore easy to miss (or indeed immediately forget) a remarkable and intriguing detail. In the seconds between Carlos ducking his head under the door of the plane and the establishing shot, he jerks his neck and looks *directly* into the camera – directly at *us*, as it were – before readjusting himself and moving on (Fig. 7). His expression seems to imply that he is about to speak or that he has recognized something in the distance. It communicates a faint sense of irritation or surprise, as if unexpectedly photographed. The pause is momentary, almost maddeningly subtle, but its impact is nonetheless felt, planting a sort of subliminal reference point in the mind of the viewer. Not quite a break in the fourth wall, but a visible, *embodied snapshot* of the famous face that we know and don’t know – the frozen image brought to life. The fact that the picture in Carlos’s passport is of Ramírez *without* sunglasses serves to highlight what I have previously described as the film’s compositional ‘relays’, in this case a relay between cinematic expression and the non-cinematic media that provide the film with its raw materials.





Figure 7. Beirut Airport

The three other examples of this are progressively more identifiable. As Carlos nervously waits for the arrival of comrades from the Japanese Red Army outside the French Embassy in the Hague, the device is still transient but much clearer: he wears a new pair of sunglasses – Carlos was able to afford Christian Dior according to his biographer John Follain (1998: 78) – that exactly correspond to the style worn in the photograph and his face is framed by the window of a Volkswagen Golf. He noisily exhales a cloud of cigarette smoke before the image is momentarily ‘fixed’, the close-up within the close-up (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. Waiting at the French Embassy

During a discussion between Carlos and Nydia, Assayas’s technique is clearer still: Having hastily exited a bar in Paris, they walk into a grey day as an agitated Carlos explains his concerns following the disappearance of Michel ‘Andre’ Moukharbal, his designated link to Haddad, and the man he would eventually execute alongside two unarmed members of the French DST in the apartment on rue Toullier.<sup>24</sup> With the base of the Eiffel Tower visible in the background and a dull, misty skyline, the ‘Face of Terror’ is there again, his eyes a little wider this time, as Carlos swivels his head to Nydia (who we see from behind) and lets out a stream of Spanish invectives. An animated postcard of the Jackal (Fig. 9).



After rue Toullier, the multiple homicides that gave Carlos his first taste of media infamy and condemned him to a life on-the-run, Assayas takes us to the Air France bus terminal in Les Invalides. Here,



Figure 9. Tension before rue Toullier

he bumps into a female acquaintance buying a ticket with her young daughter – another figure unnamed in the film but evidently based on the British secretary Angela Armstrong, a friend of one of Carlos's numerous lovers in Paris (Follain 1998: 78). As 'Angela' greets the seated Carlos, the details of the terminal are almost entirely obscured by blazing sunlight coming through a glass wall – a naturalistic metaphor, perhaps, for the intense glare of publicity that would ultimately place him in the perverse, untenable position of thriving on headlines whilst leading a clandestine existence. Carlos asks her warily if she has 'heard the news' before motioning her over to a corner. The light subsides as the camera angle changes and faux-wood-panelling becomes the backdrop. We see Angela's shoulders and the back of her head on the left of the screen, as well as the hair and eyes of her fidgeting daughter at bottom centre, who Carlos has grasped round the waist. Squared in the middle, of course, is Carlos – his face just a few centimeters away from being straight on. The sunglasses, the sideburns and the hair are all in place as he darkly makes the following announcement in a low voice: 'I killed three policemen and an Arab shit who betrayed me. I will kill anyone who betrays me. I need you to do something for me'. Lest we be tempted into over-identifying with the

Jackal's strange attraction (especially as the casting of Ramírez rather flatters the real Carlos), here we are reminded that the photograph is live and dangerous (Fig. 10).



Figure 10. After the murders

## Extraordinary Renditions / A Conclusion

Assayas's engagement with the processes of faciality and naming is therefore an obsessive, insistent but also tremendously delicate tactic. As processes which are built into the actual conditions of the narrative, this means that *Carlos* is able to ask troubling questions about ownership, authenticity and embodiment without falling back on the self-cancelling avant-garde formulae associated with the perennial struggle against the society of the spectacle. As profoundly marked by Debord as Assayas might be, *Carlos* is certainly not an example of standard *dé-tournement*, even when it most resembles an action movie, a music video or surveillance footage (although it may, as I hinted early on, be understood as kind of *dérive*). A film which treats firearms, for example, as branded commodities more than instruments of terror or titillation (part of a serious exploration of the Cold War's underworld economics) can still close with the mournful, bolero-infused theatrics of 'La Pistola y El Corazon' by the Chicano folk-rock band Los Lobos and resist collapsing into archness or parody. The trajectory outlined by, say, Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), whereby 'the old left-wing denunciation of the empire of commodities and images' becomes 'a form of ironic or melancholic acquiescence to this ineluctable empire', does not play itself out in any conventional sense here (33). Instead, *Carlos* is rooted in a very particular interpretation of the Debordian relationship between aesthetics and politics – an emphasis, as Assayas states, on 'real life characters' dealing with the 'invisible forces' that determine their symbolic and material being-in-the-world (and indeed their being-in-history) (Price and Sutherland: 2008). There is a certain low-key modesty to this stance but it is, at the same time, an inherently complex and inherently flexible synthesis of theory and practice, rooted in a cinematic vision that builds from the ground up: faces and names deliver momentary associations and impressions; associations and impressions become networks and structures; networks and structures become nation states; nation states become entities in a much larger game of geo-political chess and so on. With that point in mind, I would also suggest that Assayas's film ultimately asks ethico-political questions about the loaded decision-making that is an inevitable part of putting a figure like Carlos on screen. This, in fact, is how I would interpret Greil Marcus's comment (partially cited earlier) about 'the imperative, the momentum, of a film itself thinking', which can only be born out of a true openness to the world being depicted and the means available to do so (2012: 198).

Staying with the theme of names of faces, and also picking up on some of the passing references I have made to music, there are even moments when the film appears to be thinking *out loud* – as compounded by the diverse selection of songs that make up the film's aural environment. The riotous, anthemic fury of 'Sonic Reducer', for example, by seminal Cleveland punk outfit The Dead Boys,<sup>25</sup> accompanies the dramatic capture of Gabriele Kröcher-Tiedemann (aka 'Nada'),

one of Carlos's OPEC accomplices, in 1977. As Nada is confronted by Swiss border guards, the noise is formally 'relayed' (once more) between diegetic and non-diegetic channels, between a car stereo and a conventionally overlaid soundtrack, as the nihilistic lyrics screamed by Stiv Bators proclaim: 'I don't need anyone / Don't need no Mom and Dad / Don't need no pretty face / Don't need no human race'. These lines immediately speak to the film's resistance to, say, facile kinds of Oedipal interpretation and, more significantly, its advanced consciousness of the relationship between pop culture, violence and mediation. Perhaps the use of the song even implies a curious overlap in the escape from urban ennui and bourgeois stultification offered by both punk and international terrorism, as well as evoking concerns about integrity, alter-egoic excess and 'selling out' that haunt the paths of both the outsider musician and the 'professional revolutionary'. The snarling rejection of 'pretty face[s]', however, is surely the most significant detail to emerge from the stylised chaos of the scene – as if the film were visibly and *audibly* grappling with the problematic allure of Carlos's celebrity and with the fundamental gap between Ramírez-as-Carlos and the Carlos who will most likely spend the rest of his days in prison (both of whom are defined, as it were, by faces that are not quite theirs). Strikingly, the large tinted sunglasses that Nada wears cannot help but recall the inescapable face of the Jackal – an unexpected extension of the 'overcoding' technique explored previously. With the strategically framed head shots that initiate and conclude the sequence, one displaying smirking self-satisfaction and the other breathless panic, we are once again 'faced' by the embodied/ethereal force of the Carlos brand (Figs. 11 and 12).



Figure 11. 'Don't need no pretty face'; Fig. 12. Nada is captured

In part 3 of *Carlos*, during the long montage that tracks the rue Marbeuf bomb from Yugoslavia to France, Assayas deploys the richly textured industrial throb of 'Drill' by Wire, the English art-punk innovators (whose connections to Situationism, like the director's, are well documented). As Fröhlich crosses numerous European checkpoints, the pulsating bass line appears to propel her Opel Kadett towards its deadly stop in Paris and the yelped, incantatory lyrics function as a sort of choric device: 'How's it with you? / What's your form? / Your outline, shape or form / How's your price? / What do you cost? / Your value, profit or loss / How's your skull? Does it fit? / Is your mind free, empty or split?'<sup>26</sup> As it should now be clear, the effect is not intrusively 'experimental' and this unlikely 'chorus' does not disturb the film's ground-level sense of space and time. Rather, we must recognise such questions as embedded in the raw materials of the film's composition and in the theoretical/experiential processes of the editing suite. Indeed, these are precisely the questions that Assayas and the 'film itself' ask about Carlos (and indeed about the general desire to narrativise, package and consume historical violence). Asking such questions means confronting some of the most contested and gruesome intricacies of recent geopolitics – the latter stages of the Cold War, the convoluted and fractious development of Palestinian radicalism and the traumatic collapse of the European revolutionary left – as well as paying serious attention to the phantasmagorical hyperreality that was also the Jackal's stalking ground. In doing so, Assayas can sail his film between the Scylla and Charybdis of vapidly ironic terrorist chic and a hopeless, relativistic conservatism that sees all fixed commitments and all forms of resistance as corrupt.

Moreover, Assayas is able to communicate how Carlos (as man and myth) was able to influence the course of History whilst also finding himself hopelessly vulnerable to its radical contingencies as a hired gun for the various states he served, which is why writing him off as a mere relic is so problematic. Indeed, even if a haunted-eyed Johannes Weinrich (played by Alexander Scheer) tells Carlos directly that he has become 'a communist wine-bag', that 'the war is over and we've *lost*' (thus prefiguring Huyghe's assessment of Carlos as a 'dinosaur' at his trial), the strange synthesis of visceral material threat and fantastical simulation that Carlos represents – his 'outline, shape or form', his 'cost' – is surely not so far removed from the post-89, post-9/11, post-everything environment that has supposedly left the likes of Carlos in the dust. When Wadie Haddad, furious after the botched and compromised debacle of OPEC, claims that Carlos is 'just an executor and not a very good one', he underestimates the significance of the cultural, historical and economic footprint of Jackal. The film's basic rise-and-fall trajectory, as I have shown, is complicated by its circular investment in names and faces and the transition from young militant to burnt-out, morally indefensible mercenary is only one component of a narrative that expands and contracts, creeps and burrows. Related to this, both Assayas's film and the border-crossing terrorist at its centre can therefore be understood as exemplary expressions of 'transnation-

alism', the term that has gained such currency in recent scholarship, even if neither of them belongs to the kind of diasporic or exilic framework that is usually associated with this notion. Borrowing the language used by Hamid Naficy in his seminal work *An Accented Cinema* (2001), they can both be defined, literally and metaphorically, as 'fragmented, multilingual,' and 'epistolary', as 'amphibolic, doubled,' and 'crossed', marked by 'politicized structures of feeling' and the experience of '(dis)location', emerging from 'interstitial and collective modes of production' (4). Both are 'historical', in various senses, but very much born out of what is ongoing all around us, across the globe, right now. Carlos, it is worth remembering, is still signing his name, as demonstrated by his extravagantly courteous (and extravagantly demanding) letter to Barack Obama in 2009. Imploring the newly elected President to provide the whereabouts of his comrade Bruno Bréguet, who mysteriously disappeared in 1995 on board a ferry from Italy to Greece, he finishes his letter with a typical flourish: 'I remain, Mister President, yours in revolution, Carlos' (Ramírez Sánchez 2009).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The codename for the secret operation that culminated in the death of Osama Bin Laden.
- <sup>2</sup> The couple are not married according to French law but were formally united in an Islamic ceremony circa 2001 (Willsher 2004).
- <sup>3</sup> An appeal against the life sentence formally began on Monday 13 May 2013. Ramírez Sánchez requested a court appointed defence lawyer after claiming that the Venezuelan government had refused to cover his legal costs (Lichfield 2013).
- <sup>4</sup> I borrow this term from the promotional blurb that accompanies Susan Buck Morss's *Thinking Past Terror* (2003).
- <sup>5</sup> According to Ramírez Sánchez (if accounts by Cummings and Follain can be trusted), the lines are from a 'cowboy' film. I have been unable to identify the source of the quotation in any Western but, weirdly and intriguingly, it does bear some resemblance to a line spoken by Chico to Harpo in *The Cocoanuts* (dir. Joseph Santley and Robert Florey, 1929): 'I'd kill someone for money, I'd kill *you* for money. Ah, no. You're my friend. I'd kill you for nothing.'
- <sup>6</sup> Johannes Weinrich (already imprisoned in Germany), Christa-Margot Fröhlich (a fugitive at the time of the trial, believed to be on German soil) and Ali Kamal al-Issawi (whereabouts unknown). See Clark 2011.
- <sup>7</sup> I take this phrase from the title of Loretta Napoleoni's *Terror Incorporated* (2005), a work of investigative journalism on the economics of global terrorism. For specific information on Carlos see 21, 57, 62.



- <sup>8</sup> *The Guardian* journalist Peter Niesewand was led to a flat in London shared by Angela Otaola and Barry Woodhams, one-time associates of Carlos, in July 1975 during the fallout from the rue Toullier murders. When Niesewand discovered a copy of Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* (1971), the legend was born. The irony, confirmed by Woodhams himself years later, was that the novel belonged to him and not Carlos (Yallop 1993: 130; Follain 1998: 90-91).
- <sup>9</sup> For detailed accounts of OPEC see Smith 1976: 221-244; Yallop 1993: 375-426; Follain 1998: 99-126.
- <sup>10</sup> The title of an Assayas retrospective at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) Cinématek in October 2010.
- <sup>11</sup> The Criterion version is the exception to this rule.
- <sup>12</sup> The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Founded by George Habbash in 1953, the PFLP's early platform (or manifesto) is reproduced in Laqueur and Rubin 2001: 169-170.
- <sup>13</sup> The narrative of the film revolves around a US naval officer, Lt. Cmdr. Annibal Ramírez, who bears an uncanny resemblance to the infamous Jackal and is subsequently recruited into a covert operation jointly run by the CIA and Mossad.
- <sup>14</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njckUdEth-I>
- <sup>15</sup> In Assayas's film, these words are given to Riyadh al-Azzawi, the Iraqi chargé d'affaires in Vienna who visits Carlos before the OPEC building is stormed. Assayas thus makes a strong commitment by picking up on the inroads made by Yallop (who argues strongly for seeing OPEC as an Iraqi operation primarily engineered by Saddam Hussein and mediated by the Haddad). Follain, in contrast, presents the case for Colonel Gaddafi's involvement (Yallop 1993: 375-377; Follain 1998: 102-103).
- <sup>16</sup> According to French criminal records, Sánchez and Kopp married in 1979 in Lebanon (Follain 1998: 150).
- <sup>17</sup> The origins of this photograph are explained in all major studies of Carlos. See, for example, the notes that accompany the image in Yallop 1993: Fig. 19.
- <sup>18</sup> This process of 'Warholisation' is literalised very vividly on the front cover of Black Grape's album *It's Great When You're Straight... Yeah!* (Radioactive Records, 1995). Carlos's face is recoloured in lurid neon shades, with the band's name and the album title stencilled onto the lenses of his sunglasses.
- <sup>19</sup> Entitled *October 18, 1977*. The images are viewable here:  
[http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/paintings/photo\\_paintings/category.php?catID=56](http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/paintings/photo_paintings/category.php?catID=56)
- <sup>20</sup> Interestingly, given the complex relationship here between media iconography, violence and visual art, Adams's photograph of Khaled was recently recreated using 3,500 lipstick tubes by Amer Shomali for the *Framed-Unframed* exhibition at Birzeit University in Ramallah (Hilwi 2011).
- <sup>21</sup> See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_GEj4F-lek](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_GEj4F-lek)
- <sup>22</sup> Carlos resided in an apartment block on Africa Street, near Khartoum airport (Follain 1993: 204), whilst Bin Laden was based on Al-Mashtal Street in the Al-Riyadh quarter (Reeve 1999: 217). A quick search on Google maps reveals how startlingly close the two addresses are.
- <sup>23</sup> Assayas even has Carlos shout '*¡Hasta la Victoria Siempre!*' as he departs with a busload of hostages.
- <sup>24</sup> For accounts of rue Toullier see Smith 1976: 196-217; Follain 1998: 72-98; Burleigh 2008: 180-181.
- <sup>25</sup> From the album *Young, Loud and Snotty* (Sire Records, 1977).
- <sup>26</sup> From the *Snakedrill* EP (Mute, 1986).



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